IMPAC Assessment Project and Communicative Language Assessment

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Abstract— The paper talks my experience using communicative language testing in IMPCT School

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1 INTRODUCTION

Observing different classes in the USA has impressed me and given me knowledge of how students are active and motivated to participate in different kinds of activities that teachers often use. As a middle school and university teacher, I have used traditional ways of testing English as a foreign language. However, observing different classes has made me realize that I can make testing English as a second or foreign language more effective. I learned that using a communicative approach in some points of testing the language can enhance students' knowledge of their English while revealing the use of the language. According to Littlewood (2000), a communicative approach views "language not only in terms of its structures (grammar and vocabulary), but also in terms of the communicative functions that it performs." Bachman & Palmer (1996) noted, "in order for a particular language test to be useful for its intended purposes, test performance must correspond in demonstrable ways to language use in non-test situations" (p. 9). Therefore, a teacher will be able to use communicative language testing to test students by giving an assessment of some aspects of the language and the students' knowledge efficiency in regard to reliability, validity, authenticity, feedback, and practicality.

Bailey (1998) stated that there are principles for the communicative approach when designing a test. The first principle is "Start from somewhere … the assessment should be based on sound theoretical principles. It entails having a clear understanding of the construction we are trying to measure" (p. 154). To have high validity in a communicative language test, we need to understand what is the aspect of language we are trying to measure. Validity in communicative language testing, according to Weir (1990), is that "a test should always be designed on a principle basis, however limited the underlying theory, and, wherever possible after its administration,

statistical validation procedures should be applied to the result to determine how successful the test has been in measuring what it intended to measure" (p. 23). In IMPAC we tried to measure pronunciation since the assessment was an alternative one and used oral presentations. The host teacher and IMPAC's director thought testing pronunciation was not possible since the students' levels were not sufficient enough to be tested in pronunciation. Instead of that, we decided to test students' spelling.

Another principle that Bailey (1998) indicated was "Concentrate on Content. The content (in terms of both topics and tasks) … should be appropriate in terms of the age, proficiency level, interests, and goals of the learner" (p. 154). Choosing an appropriate topic for the test or the assessment for the students' ages is important. If a teacher chose a topic about the Cinderella story for a writing test in an advanced level class consisting of adults, the interest in the topic likely will be very low, especially if the test is oral, because the students might feel the topic is not for adults. In addition, giving very low learners a very challenging topic, such as very detailed science in a test, would overwhelm the test-takers in the matter of proficiency. The third principle according to Bailey (1998) is "Bias for best" saying a "test should be designed so as to elicit the best possible performance from the test-takers" (p. 154). The atmosphere should be comfortable for students, starting with the equipment and including the materials they need for the exam. If the room is too hot or very cold, students' performance will be reduced. An example for needed equipment is a dictionary when students write very long papers. If the focus in the paper is the content and the sentence structure, not the use of vocabulary, then students should be allowed to use a dictionary.

From my experience in the project we did at IMPAC, we chose to give an oral presentation assessment about vocabulary

because of numerous advantages. According to Weir (1990), it allows the learner to talk about him/herself. Also, by integrating the activity with previously heard or read texts, tasks can be equated realistically with real life tasks in a specific situation. Therefore, we allowed in our instructions that they use written sentences while giving the presentation, since they had to use at least 10 of the vocabulary words in 10 sentences. However, a teacher should be careful about what should and should not be provided.

Another principle of communicative language testing is the "consideration of the washback." According to Bailey (1998), "assessment procedures should be designed and used so as to promote positive washback. This goal involves clearly defining our scoring criteria, as well as making them available to students and teachers alike" (p. 154). Feedback can help them to work on their language weaknesses after taking a test or assessment, either if given immediately or afterwards. Brown (2010) stated, "In classroom-based assessment, washback can have a number of positive manifestation, ranging from the benefit of preparing and reviewing for a test to the learning that accurate from feedback on one's performance" (p. 38). Positive washback helps students to develop their language in the future.

Freeman (2011) stated that the communicative language teaching approach is one of the most successful methods of teaching and learning English language in this century. Authentic language is used successfully in this approach, which means students will be involved in real life contexts. As Spence-Brown (2001) said, tests should "reflect the use of language in the real world" (p. 463). Brown (2010) said, an authentic task "is likely to be enacted in the real world" (p. 36). Authenticity has an importance in testing as do reliability, practicality, and validity. According to Bo (2007), "authenticity has become established as a central concern in test design and test validation" (p .31). Using authentic language in testing will facilitate learners' understanding that the language is used in real life and can be used in different situations besides the test or assessment. Additionally, one target of this kind of language testing is that the learner would be able to figure out the speaker's or the writer's intention, then respond to it naturally. As Doye (1991) noted, an

authentic test supposes to be "one that reproduces a real-life situation in order to examine the student's ability to cope with it" (p. 3). The learner should be able to reuse the content in the test successfully in real life.

3 CONCLUSION

My experience in IMPAC created a curiosity to discover more about other methods of testing, such as communicative language testing, alternative testing, and integrative testing. Considering principals such as credibility, validity, practicality, authenticity, and washback, all enhance learning, teaching, and learning processes for both teachers and students. Communicative language testing and alternative testing have an interactive feature, which increases students' production in the language and their performance in the test.

4 REFRENCE

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